

Audio file

[1973-10-03 - 23 - Spiro T Agnew resignation press conference.mp3](#)

Transcript

00:00:00

Element where Attorney General Elliot Richardson is about to hold a news conference to provide more details on the investigation that led to Spiro Agnew's resignation as vice president yesterday. The Attorney general will be accompanied by George Bell, the US attorney who served as prosecutor in the case as part of a deal with the Justice Department. Agnew yesterday coupled his resignation.

00:00:20

The plea of no contest to a tax evasion charge is fined \$10,000 and placed on three years probation. The Justice Department also released yesterday a lengthy document detailing evidence concerning the kickback charges set aside in the plea bargaining process.

00:00:38

Also expected to be in the room during today's news conference, our Assistant Attorney General Henry Peterson, who drew acid criticism by then Vice President Agnew recently, and some of the US Assistant US attorneys who worked with Prosecutor Bell here is Attorney General Richardson.

00:00:58

Right.

00:01:01

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen of the press. I wish to make it clear at the outset that it is the purpose of this press conference. Simply to clarify matters which may have been left somewhat less than clear with regard to the proceedings by which.

00:01:18

We reached this point.

00:01:20

My office has received numerous inquiries from you and I have not been in a position until now to make myself available to try to answer them.

00:01:31

I emphatically believe that it would not serve any meritorious interests.

00:01:36

To continue to debate charges and counter charges.

00:01:40

Our purpose should be to put the matter to rest.

00:01:45

There are two points I made in court before Judge Hoffman yesterday, which I would like to under score this morning. The first relates to my strong hope that the American people understand and support what has been done.

00:02:00

I said yesterday the agreement between the parties now before the Court is one which must be just and honourable.

00:02:09

And which must be perceived to be just and honourable, not simply to the parties, but above all to the American people.

00:02:19

From the outset of the negotiations, which have culminated in these proceedings, the Department of Justice has regarded as an integral requirement of any agreement.

00:02:29

A Full disclosure of the surrounding circumstances for only with knowledge of these circumstances can the American people fairly judge the justice of the outcome.

00:02:42

Second, I wish to.

00:02:44

Urged consideration and compassion again for the Vice president, who has rendered a high service by resigning and relieving the nation of a prolonged and potentially disastrous period of anguish and uncertainty.

00:03:02

I also stated in court yesterday.

00:03:04

I am firmly convinced that in all the circumstances, leniency is justified. I am keenly aware first.

00:03:13

Of the historic magnitude of the penalties inherent in the vice president's resignation from his high office.

00:03:20

And his acceptance of a judgment of conviction.

00:03:24

For a felony.

00:03:26

To propose that a man who has suffered these penalties should in addition be incarcerated in the penal institution, however briefly, is more than I, as head of the government's prosecuting arm, can recommend or wish.

00:03:42

Finally, I would like to commend the government, prosecutors, United States Attorney Bell and Assistant United States attorneys Scholnick, Baker and Liebman.

00:03:56

For their tenacious pursuit of justice and their wise counsel, although they did not always agree with me.

00:04:05

Particularly with regard to the painful issue of sentencing.

00:04:10

I know that they were at all times motivated by the highest regard for the public interest. I would in addition.

00:04:19

Like, especially to commend Assistant Attorney General Peterson for his courageous and distinguished service. In this case, the characteristics of Fair and fearless prosecution of justice.

00:04:34

Have been the hallmark of his more than two decades of service to the nation.

00:04:41

I believe Mr. Stewart of Reuters has the 1st.

00:04:44

Question.

00:04:46

Attorney General, I think in the eyes of many ordinary was pretty thoroughly done in yesterday by having to give up with the Vice Presidency and accept conviction on a felony charge. Tax evasion, that being so, what purpose was served by your spreading on the record? All of the evidence that you had amassed had you.

00:05:06

Gone ahead to try him on extortion and bribery. I think many people see this as as sort of piling on to somebody who's already down.

00:05:16

As I said yesterday in court, and as I have repeated just now, it has been regarded by the Department of Justice from the outset as essential to any agreement that there be Full disclosure of the surrounding circumstances, including.

00:05:37

The evidence assembled by the government during the course of its investigation we have had, unfortunately, over recent months, a sense that there has been a cover up in some situations of facts which.

00:05:56

The public were entitled to know.

00:05:59

And in order to achieve and enhance public confidence in our institutions of.

00:06:07

Justice and in the administration of justice.

00:06:10

It has seemed to us in the Department of Justice essential. They said that the American people be in a position.

00:06:20

Themselves.

00:06:22

To judge the basis on which this matter has been handled, the this has been the the sole reason for the disclosures that we have made.

00:06:36

And I would emphasize the fact not only was this part of the agreement that it was understood and accepted by attorneys for the Vice President and by the Vice President himself, and with the concurrence of the Court.

00:06:52

The statement you referred to was entered into the record of the court proceedings themselves.

00:07:01

Will you tell us precisely what role President Nixon may have played in the decisions in this case? In particular, the President expressly approved the entering into plea bargaining. Did he suggest parameters, limits or details of the Justice Department's position in that?

00:07:19

Targeting and. Did he expressly approve and advance the final settlement?

00:07:24

The president was kept, of course, fully informed at all times.

00:07:29

He fully approved each of the major steps that were taken in the course of these negotiations.

00:07:37

He did not participate in the negotiations as such.

00:07:42

He.

00:07:43

Had, of course, as president of the United States, to be satisfied that.

00:07:50

The essential elements of what was being done.

00:07:54

Were consonant with the public interest.

00:07:58

May I just follow up? Since you didn't respond to one part of my question, did he suggest any of those elements, either by omission or by setting parameters, or by we can express suggestion?

00:08:09

No, he did not. He was, of course, concerned, as all of us were with the potential consequences of a, a prolonged and agonizing trial of these issues of fact.

00:08:24

And this was a concern, naturally, that that he felt as.

00:08:31

Did the vice president himself and those of us who represented the Department of Justice?

00:08:36

The general Mr. Richardson.

00:08:39

You've completed the criminal aspects of this. I understand total, but there are some tax aspects that are still in the offing. You do intend to pursue those civil tax matters with all of the the diligence you have been pursuing, the criminal matters.

00:08:58

Or.

00:08:59

In line with the exposition of facts set out in your 40 page document.

00:09:00

There's.

00:09:05

These, Mr. Mullenhoff, are matters before the Internal Revenue Service of the Department of the Treasury. As Judge Hoffman pointed out yesterday.

00:09:05

The.

00:09:17

These are not matters that could be concluded.

00:09:21

In a criminal proceeding.

00:09:23

And they remain to to be worked out and to be pursued further as between the Internal Revenue Service and the Council for the Vice President.

00:09:33

General, is my understanding there is no statute limitation on the civil aspects of this and that Mister Agnew could well be indebted to the government for penalties of 50% plus maybe several \$100,000?

00:09:49

I wouldn't care to speculate about the possible amounts or the question of whether or not they wear penalties. These are not matter.

00:09:58

Within the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice scrutiny, this gentleman over here.

00:10:02

Can you tell us whether you?

00:10:04

King meant the readers digest. Mr. Attorney General, can I follow up on next question by under the Organized Crime Control Act of 1970? Title 9, You have several authority to proceed in several proceedings against any.

00:10:20

Group.

00:10:20

Organization having demonstrated a pattern of racketeering, activity, bribery, corruption itself.

00:10:27

You could force divestiture and ownership of the firm. You could force the dissolution of the firms. Apparently you could force civil reparations. You intend to use this authority.

00:10:38

No, this is not a situation in any aspect of which in my view.

00:10:43

Properly belongs within this scope of that statute.

00:10:47

Yes, the allegations in your 40 page document yesterday contained a lot more than one count of income tax evasion. But why did you settle for just one count?

00:10:48

Now.

00:10:59

But of course the the very essence of a negotiated plea is that.

00:11:04

That each side yields something in order to achieve agreement.

00:11:11

And while.

00:11:13

If.

00:11:15

Satisfying.

00:11:17

In terms of weight.

00:11:20

And substance to a grand jury. For this evidence could have supported an indictment.

00:11:29

Covering charges substantially more extensive than those that were covered in the single count information.

00:11:36

And in that event, these would have been tried. The consequence of our pursuing that course would, as I pointed out, inevitably have been to justify the Vice President in insisting.

00:11:52

That the government be put to its proof that means, in other words, that we would have had to have.

00:12:00

Very prolonged court proceedings or potentially proceedings in the Congress by way of impeachment.

00:12:08

General, can you tell us 1 of departments?

00:12:09

The department initiated the fleet bargaining. Or did Mr. Agnew and his lawyer?

00:12:14

The department did not initiate the plea bargaining. We were approached in the first instance, not only in the the recent negotiations, but in the earlier period of negotiations.

00:12:27

And that took place in September.

00:12:29

We understood one point.

00:12:33

Kelly described for us the chronology of the fleet bargaining when proposals were made, who made them and.

00:12:42

Finally, how did the the arrangement get made? You indicated that some of your your aid did not agree with the the deal on the on the sentence. Can you tell us exactly how this came about and how the deal was made?

00:12:58

There was a period of negotiations in September.

00:13:02

Which failed to achieve agreement.

00:13:06

Negotiations were resumed first by telephone on Saturday of this past weekend and then.

00:13:18

There was a meeting with Council for the Vice president on Monday.

00:13:26

And with the.

00:13:29

Judge, which was followed by an additional meeting with the judge and with Council on Tuesday afternoon, and it was at that Tuesday afternoon meeting when the final provisions of the agreement were were concluded.

00:13:49

The are the witnesses who provided the information against Vice President still subject to prosecution and incarceration.

00:13:57

Yes, they are the.

00:14:00

40 page statement filed with the court yesterday covers the the terms of the understandings with the key witnesses on which the statement itself was based.

00:14:17

It makes clear that none of these individuals were promised immunity from prosecution.

00:14:24

There have been, in the case of two understandings with respect to to the plea.

00:14:33

That they would make.

00:14:35

But in no instance has any individual been given a promise as to disposition of the case.

00:14:44

During your tenure or to your knowledge previous to that were any efforts made by the White House by the Vice President's Office or any other outsiders to quash the actual investigation?

00:14:46

1.

00:14:58

There were no such efforts.

00:15:00

General, when you said that this appointment did not initiate plea bargaining in early September and you were approached, who were you approached first by directly into that meeting counsel for Mr. Agnew or Counsel for the White House?

00:15:01

Yeah.

00:15:18

The first call I had was a call from Presidents Council asking if I would be willing to meet with Council for the Vice President.

00:15:30

Yes.

00:15:31

Under Mr. Agnew's unsupervised, suspended sentence, would he be allowed to leave the country? Prisons go to his ancestral Greece to live.

00:15:42

At least three years.

00:15:43

I'm sure that the court would not want to impose any narrow restrictions. This is of course, a matter for the Court, but since.

00:15:54

The judge made clear that that the probation would be unsupervised, that barring some change of circumstance, I suppose that the that Mister Agnew would be.

00:16:08

Free to live wherever he chooses.

00:16:11

Yes, the President has repeatedly contended that the charges do not relate in any way to the conduct of the Vice President's office as Vice President. And yet.

00:16:22

Develop sizeable information that they do that at least on two instances he was awarded. He I'm sorry he received 2500 for the award of a GSA contract and there was another instance in the 40 pages. Wasn't the president advised of this or didn't he understand the briefings you gave him when he said they didn't relate to the periods which?

00:16:42

He was vice.

00:16:43

President, he was aware that that the investigation touched on.

00:16:49

This the \$2500 matter, but it was of course.

00:16:57

At the time when he learned of this at a very early stage in the investigative process and the charge could not of course be considered proven.

00:17:09

And so the president was, in effect, in a position in which it would have been unfair on his part to to imply that he believed that there had been proof of wrongdoing by the Vice President in that capacity.

00:17:24

Final in your final agreement, person that you.

00:17:28

Agree on the same penalty that you were holding.

00:17:32

Out for in your original.

00:17:34

Negotiations for the Vice Presidents Officer, was it substantially the same agreement or in the original negotiations where you're asking for others guilty plea to other charge?

00:17:45

The.

00:17:48

I don't want to go into real detail on the the negotiations. I think that that.

00:17:55

The public interest is better served by the result than it would be by blow by blow account of of the discussions that went on among council, or simply say that that the.

00:18:11

As to the matter of disposition that was deferred.

00:18:16

Until such time as it became.

00:18:21

Evident that the recommendation of this department.

00:18:26

Would be regarded by the judge as important to the courts disposition of the matter. And so that question therefore, was not squarely reached until after the meeting with Judge Hoffman on Monday and and then finally.

00:18:46

Disposed of at the subsequent meeting with him on Tuesday. One more follow up.

00:18:53

Mr. Bell and his staff wanted.

00:18:54

In terms of sentencing.

00:18:56

No, I don't. I don't believe that first place they had had reached a a firm view as to what the alternative would be, but clearly.

00:19:10

This was a matter in which.

00:19:12

Reasonable men, including.

00:19:16

Attorneys could disagree, and I fully respect their views.

00:19:22

When did you first learn of the dimensions of the case and when did you first discuss it with the President? And was it your feeling then that he had previously been aware of the investigation?

00:19:33

I first discussed with the President early in August.

00:19:39

And I had made.

00:19:42

Members of his staff First General Haig, aware of it in July, and he therefore already knew something about the situation as a result of communication to him by General Hague.

00:19:58

More delighted to believe.

00:20:00

I think he was aware. In addition before that that an investigation was underway because he had been so informed by the Vice president himself.

00:20:12

Yes.

00:20:12

You're interested. Did you withhold some of the evidence against the former vice president, or has all the evidence that's come to your?

00:20:18

Attention you've made public.

00:20:20

All of the evidence that that has.

00:20:24

Been developed on a basis that we believed would have been sufficient to to submit to a grand jury if the grand jury.

00:20:37

We're going to be asked to act on this matter as of October 10.

00:20:44

In the agreement on not proceeding criminally with the Vice President.

00:20:49

On the evidence that is established now, in other words, if something new comes out next week that you didn't know about.

00:20:58

Would you be limited in your prosecution in that area?

00:21:02

We would be limited.

00:21:04

With respect to anything of of this kind that antedated.

00:21:09

The.

00:21:11

Court proceedings yesterday.

00:21:13

In other words, anything in the corruption and fraud area while he was executive officer and Mara in Baltimore County, Governor of Maryland and Vice President, would be barred. And anyone that comes forward now.

00:21:25

Yes.

00:21:30

New information would be turned aside or would be sent to the Internal Revenue Service.

00:21:37

Yeah.

00:21:41

The Internal Revenue Service, of course, would only deal with the civil aspects of the situation. The so far as the government's investigation is concerned, federal government.

00:21:55

And the things that have have been touched on are uncovered in the course of that investigation. The matter is closed.

00:22:03

Never disclosed relative to fixes of the GSA involving Mr. Cagney. Would you proceed with that?

00:22:12

No.

00:22:12

We would not.

00:22:13

General Matt Cooney, Westinghouse broadcasting. We've been through a period of unprecedented in American history.

00:22:18

And.

00:22:20

What do you believe the nation can learn from the Agnew case?

00:22:24

Mr. Cooney, I would hope first that.

00:22:30

The nation would feel that.

00:22:34

The process of criminal justice is one that it can trust and have confidence in.

00:22:44

I would hope that it would feel that.

00:22:50

The interests of the nation.

00:22:52

Have been placed first by all those concerned, including the Vice President himself.

00:22:59

I would hope that.

00:23:01

Most fundamentally.

00:23:04

All of us.

00:23:05

Would have confidence that our system works.

00:23:12

Indeed, I think this is the most affirmative aspect of all that has taken place over recent months.

00:23:19

All the disclosures, the investigations, the indictments.

00:23:23

They have exposed.

00:23:27

The shoddy side of.

00:23:30

The governmental and political process, but they have also demonstrated that the governmental and political process is capable.

00:23:41

Of uncovering these things and having uncovered them.

00:23:45

Taking proper action, the vice president be called as a witness in any future criminal prosecution.

00:23:53

I don't know. He's certainly not immune from being called. And as the judge said that other proceedings are May, of course.

00:24:03

Involved his name or his role insofar as that is relevant to the proceeding against someone else, yes.

00:24:12

Could I address the questions Mr. Valley as attorneys?

00:24:14

OK. Yeah.

00:24:17

Mr. Paul, Mr. Richardson has already said that there was some disagreement between him and members of your staff over the question of sentencing. Did you or members of your staff feel the sentence was too light that Mister Agnew should have been given prison sentence?

00:24:32

The members of my staff and I had ample opportunity to confer with Attorney General Richardson and Assistant Attorney General Peterson. Other persons in the Department of Justice during the whole course of this investigation.

00:24:48

Beginning, I think with our first.

00:24:50

Personal conference with the Attorney General on July 3rd, we continually expressed our views as prosecutors from our vantage point in Baltimore.

00:25:01

We continually expressed our.

00:25:05

Concerns about the case itself, the consequences of the case and so on, and I think the I can say.

00:25:15

In summary that I could know better.

00:25:19

Articulate the conclusion that was reached and the attorney general already has there was honest disagreement.

00:25:26

Among reasonable man reasonable attorneys as to what result was proper. But keep in mind that our vantage point in Baltimore was entirely different than the attorney general's vantage point in Washington. I think that should probably suffice in terms.

00:25:42

Of.

00:25:44

Prison term for the vice president.

00:25:46

There was argument over many different aspects of the of the whole.

00:25:52

Negotiating process, and I think that it would be inappropriate to single out any one particular item that came up during the discussions.

00:26:02

Well, while you're on your feet, if I may ask the question and the summary of evidence, Mr. Agnew is quoted, I believe as saying that he was following a system that had been practiced in Maryland that he found in place, which suggests this question, are you now investigating the present Maryland administration of Governor Mandel?

00:26:21

And if you are not investigating, why not?

00:26:36

It's a good question.

00:26:38

The the grand jury investigation, which began officially in January of this this year, continues. There has already been action from that grand jury in the form of indictments of other public officials in Maryland.

00:26:57

The specific parameters of the grand jury investigation is something that I would purposefully and dutifully like to avoid at this time. We have consistently taken the position, notwithstanding your polite objections. The grand jury proceedings are secret that they should be kept from public view.

00:27:17

And we expect to maintain that posture, but nonetheless to continue the investigation into bribery, corruption, kickbacks and and political misconduct in the state of Maryland.

00:27:31

And you're not ruling that you're not ruling it out.

00:27:32

Thank you.

00:27:34

Can you?

00:27:34

I I can't rule anything out at this time because the investigation continues and as I say the parameters are impossible to precisely define.

00:27:43

Mr. Attorney general.

00:27:45

I follow up question on that. The document also states that there are indications similar systems are widespread in other states do.

00:27:53

You feel there is a need.

00:27:54

For similar investigations in other states, and will the Justice Department undertake that?

00:28:00

The Justice Department has, in fact.

00:28:04

Under assistant Attorney General Peterson and United States attorneys and other districts in the country.

00:28:11

Conducted investigations and launched prosecutions arising.

00:28:14

Out of political corruption.

00:28:17

This has been true to a very large extent, for example in New Jersey.

00:28:24

In New York.

00:28:27

In Illinois and in a number of other states, and certainly this is a continuing responsibility of the.

00:28:35

Department this case and any other jurisdiction.

00:28:47

Rising for information developed in bulk.

00:28:50

And no, of no such information, yes.

00:28:54

There's a persistent reference in the 40 page document to a close associate of Mr. Agnew, unnamed. We do infer from that that he's not named as being cooperative either. Are we to infer from that that you are?

00:29:07

Proceeding against him as an object of the investigation of target, so to speak.

00:29:11

I don't think would be proper for me to suggest any inference to be.

00:29:15

Drawn from that.

00:29:16

Suggested that disturbance.

00:29:18

Don't know.

00:29:19

Mr. Richardson, I have another question for Mr. Bell.

00:29:24

George, I'm George Collins of Mr. Television news.

00:29:27

In Baltimore, Mr. Bell, you will.

00:29:30

The County Executive of Baltimore County, of course, is already under indictment. You indicated at that time that your investigation of corruption in Baltimore County whilst continuing, is it realistic now to expect?

00:29:43

That additional indictments of guest public office holders involved more accounting are forthcoming.

00:29:51

George, I would rather not get into the business of predicting what indictments may or may not.

00:29:59

Come forth from the grand jury in the foreseeable future. I think that you can anticipate that if the investigation continues, as I have said it would, that there will be additional criminal charges lodged against the the subjects of the investigation, presuming that the information that we presently have bears up under the microscopic.

00:30:19

Aye, of the grand jury proceeding.

00:30:21

Just a moment, Mr. Bell. I have another question I'd like to ask you.

00:30:27

I would like to ask you a question. Do you plan to use the Vice president in pursuing the crimes of others and to give him immunity? Has that there been any consideration for this order require that for the future?

00:30:40

I think attorney.

00:30:42

I think the attorney general answered that question essentially earlier and.

00:30:47

Question as to whether the Vice President would be used in criminal activities, in other words, are you giving a blanket and everybody who dealt with the Vice President? That's what it is.

00:30:59

Bluntly in charge.

00:31:02

The answer to the question is is no, but as to whether the there may be some.

00:31:10

Discussions with particular persons involved in the investigation.

00:31:14

The the best source of information relative to others who are involved in this mess of corruption has gone back for 10 years.

00:31:24

The investigation is still an open one as far as we are concerned and we have not yet firmly determined.

00:31:29

What persons may be spoken with and talk to in connection with that investigation?

00:31:38

You said that the first contact you had on the negotiations was with Council for the President, which Council for the President was that? And did he indicate that he was acting at the president's? Yes.

00:31:52

This was a call from Mr. Bizarre.

00:31:55

He did not indicate that he was acting at the president's behest. Mr. Bizart has at various stages during the course of these negotiations, served in a in a.

00:32:06

The capacity of facilitating communication.

00:32:10

And this was his his initial role, as it was his continuing role from time to time, this.

00:32:20

In light of the charges that have been made by Mr. Agnew against your department, and particularly against Mr. Peterson about the stories that were leaked involving the investigation of him, do you feel that that those charges were justified? And also when you tell us what your investigation of how the story, how the informant was leaked?

00:32:40

Has turned up.

00:32:41

I do not feel that the the charges were justified.

00:32:45

Certainly not in the terms set forth in the affidavit by Mr. Agnew's Counsel, filed in court, which charged a systematic campaign of leaks.

00:33:00

From the department, our own investigation failed to identify any source of leaks in the department.

00:33:10

Now obviously I cannot with total confidence assert that no one in the department said anything to a member of the press which.

00:33:22

Could be characterized as a leak.

00:33:25

I can only say first of all that we were unable to find anybody in the department who was the source of a leak and we are absolutely confident in any event that we were not responsible for a campaign of leaks.

00:33:41

We have been able to identify as Mr. Palmer readings report makes clear, a number of potential sources of information that found its way into the press outside the Department of Justice itself. Indeed, is my letter to.

00:33:59

The then vice president in August made clear.

00:34:03

There were many people outside of the department who had.

00:34:08

Information, including the witnesses themselves, who were of course the original source of our own information, yes.

00:34:17

Your name is among those mentioned as the vice.

00:34:19

Presidential possibility would you take that?

00:34:22

What was the?

00:34:23

Question.

00:34:24

Your name.

00:34:28

Your name is mentioned as a possibility for the vice presidential nomination. Would you take that nomination that passed Vice President?

00:34:34

Right.

00:34:35

No, I would not. I think it would be highly inappropriate.

00:34:40

For me as the.

00:34:43

Government's accuser?

00:34:46

Of the vice president and who, in his capacity as Attorney general, has been responsible for.

00:34:52

Bringing in criminal information against him and for the investigation that brought about his resignation to be for one moment considered as a potential successor to him, this gentleman.

00:35:06

We've said.

00:35:07

That all the the evidence that was solid enough to be presented to a grand jury is contained in your 40 page document, but I'd like to ask is whether you had other evidence not contained in here that you spelled out to the Vice presidents attorneys during the most recent round of negotiations.

00:35:29

No, there were.

00:35:31

Some references.

00:35:33

Covering matters under continuing investigation.

00:35:38

But the investigation has terminated and the disclosure made to the court constitutes, as I said earlier, a full summary of the government's case on that date, right.

00:35:51

Is there anything in the agreement which could be considered as implicitly or explicitly preventing a prosecution by state authorities against Mr. Agnew and, in the event of a state prosecution, would you share any of your evidence?

00:36:09

State prosecutors.

00:36:11

There is to answer the first part of the question. No, nothing in the agreement that would prevent action by state prosecutors.

00:36:21

The judge yesterday made this clear in summarizing. For the record, the substance of the agreement and the effect of the agreement.

00:36:32

If a state prosecutor should initiate action, we would then have to consider what steps to take. Of course, the full summary filed with the court is already a matter of record.

00:36:46

My own hope would be that it would be considered by state prosecutors, as it is by the federal prosecution that the public interest is now best served.

00:36:59

By considering this matter to have.

00:37:03

Been dealt with on a basis of fairness and justice, and the public interest both state and federal.

00:37:13

General, can you tell channel?

00:37:14

Any reason to believe any reason at all to believe that Mister Nixon knew of Mr. Agnew's misconduct prior to August of 1972?

00:37:26

I would be wholly confident.

00:37:31

In asserting that the President had no reason.

00:37:36

Of course, this is one of those instances where 1 is in effect. I have to prove the negative, but the aside from the Vice president's own mention of the fact that an investigation was underway.

00:37:52

And of course, the information that came to the Vice president to the President shortly before August 6th from General Hague, the president would not in my.

00:38:07

Judgment and belief have had any reason to know.

00:38:11

Here.

00:38:13

Background investigation by the FBI or any other period in question here in the Vice President's career.

00:38:27

21 did you examine any background materials that might have been available in 1967 and or 1968 to the President?

00:38:37

No, did not. I think it perhaps worthwhile.

00:38:43

To emphasize, this has been.

00:38:45

And.

00:38:46

Stated before, and I think it's apparent on the face of the government's disclosure of the case that.

00:38:55

That the development of this evidence arose out of.

00:39:00

And investigation of the activities of county officials in Baltimore County.

00:39:07

Mr. Bell first informed me of the status of the county investigation on June 12th of this year.

00:39:18

At that point, there was.

00:39:22

Only one slight indication that evidence might point toward acts of wrongdoing on the part of.

00:39:31

The.

00:39:32

Then Vice president, it was not until later that month that.

00:39:39

Additional evidence was developed and not until July 3rd that the investigation had reached a point.

00:39:47

Where?

00:39:50

Mr. Bell and his associates felt that it was serious enough in scope so that I should be informed of it. They did inform me fully of it on that date.

00:40:03

You say that the moral from this whole episode is that the public should have confidence in the system of justice and the public going to gather that if the man is high enough, he gets off very lightly.

00:40:17

I think this is a a feeling that some people may have.

00:40:24

And of course, it was the awareness that this would be the reaction or might be the reaction of.

00:40:32

Some of my fellow citizens that led me to try to make as clear as I could.

00:40:39

In my statement to the court yesterday.

00:40:42

That the interests of justice, as well as the interests of the public.

00:40:48

We are better served in this instance by a.

00:40:55

Disposition that did not involve.

00:40:58

Confinement of the former vice president of in a penal institution, I can only say that I.

00:41:04

Hope.

00:41:06

That these considerations.

00:41:08

Prove persuasive to the majority of my fellow citizens.

00:41:15

Sir, do you?

00:41:15

Do you consider that as far as the other targets of the grand jury go, that a precedent has been set in this case?

00:41:22

This is of course, a matter for the court.

00:41:25

To consider in dealing with any.

00:41:30

Subsequent defendant who may be brought before the court. I do believe that it's desirable that.

00:41:38

The.

00:41:39

Case of other defendants related to this investigation as a whole should.

00:41:45

The.

00:41:47

If this is the the if the District Court of Maryland can concurs, come before Judge Hoffman also.

00:41:58

Did your investigation.

00:41:58

Investigating right, they got up first.

00:42:02

Did this investigation shake the confidence you have so often expressed in the President's revenue sharing program that the government closest to the people must be the best?

00:42:16

No, certainly not.

00:42:20

All I need say on that score is is is to remind you that.

00:42:24

That I came to the.

00:42:27

Federal government under this administration, after tour of duty as United States Attorney for.

00:42:37

The district of Massachusetts where.

00:42:39

My efforts were largely devoted to uncovering state level corruption.

00:42:45

I was Attorney General of Massachusetts and in that capacity followed the.

00:42:53

The period of tenure of Journey, General Brook.

00:42:57

Who was largely involved in prosecution of Massachusetts corruption.

00:43:04

And I had to deal with with that again.

00:43:09

And I have always felt that the the surest way of eroding.

00:43:19

Both the quality and the integrity of state and local government is to deal with them on a basis that that implies a lack of trust and that does not rest.

00:43:31

Clear cut.

00:43:33

Accountability on them. I think the best way to improve their quality is to.

00:43:40

Is to.

00:43:41

Make clear where the responsibility lies, and at least.

00:43:47

In matters that are of direct and immediate concern to people and where it is important that their government be responsive to them and sense.

00:44:00

Live to local needs.

00:44:03

Yeah.

00:44:04

Could you give us your thoughts on this, that impassioned or Mr. Agnew could have come at the end of the road rather than the beginning of the road, and that a trial of public trial or appeal, although so matter, could very well be brought to the forms.

00:44:21

And the greatest deterrent to a repetition of this at any level.

00:44:25

In the future.

00:44:27

This was certainly a a point of view that that had to be weighed and considered.

00:44:35

But of course the the price of whatever gain might have been achieved in that direction would have been the.

00:44:43

Prolonged anguish.

00:44:45

And uncertainty associated with.

00:44:50

The trial of an incumbent vice president? Yeah.

00:44:55

Can you tell us?

00:44:57

I think could you tell us, Sir, when and in what manner the President approved the agreement that was entered into court yesterday?

00:45:04

The president that didn't pass on the agreement as such, and in its specific terms and conditions.

00:45:12

His was a role rather of.

00:45:17

Approving the general direction and the fundamental basis upon which the.

00:45:25

The matter was being handled.

00:45:29

Did you present the outline of the agreement to him after it was reached Tuesday afternoon? And did he comment upon it or give it a clearance rate to go into court and make that agreement?

00:45:38

It was, it was presented to him, I believe, by the Vice President himself on on Tuesday evening. I did not make any any presentation to him.

00:45:49

1st.

00:45:49

Convicted of felonies in this country are commonly stripped of their civil rights.

00:45:53

Including the right to vote. Will this occur in Mr. Agnew's case?

00:45:57

He can continue to vote.

00:45:59

According to.

00:46:01

The.

00:46:04

Views of our assistant Attorney general heading the Office of Legal Counsel. There will be no consequence with respect to property rights.

00:46:17

And there would be no prohibition against his holding office under the Maryland Constitution.

00:46:24

Directions on the tax aspects of this matter. Is there any evidence that you have that shows that the President paid any part of the tax on the pay off?

00:46:36

Thank you.

00:46:37

Money he was receiving in this period of time, in other words, did he report and pay?

00:46:42

Tax on the income in the earlier years.

00:46:46

The tax investigation, which was going forward.

00:46:53

Concurrently with the investigation of other aspects of this matter had not been completed as of yesterday and.

00:47:03

I in the 1st place I cannot answer the question.

00:47:07

The second place since it is now a civil matter pending before the Internal Revenue Service, it would be inappropriate in any event, the.

00:47:18

Anytime.

00:47:20

The Justice Department was under a certain amount of pressure on the news leaks issue. Apparently, senior justice officials were supposed to have given sworn depositions yesterday, and I'm wondering if that fact had anything to do with the timing of the Southland Flea bar.

00:47:38

Not certainly as far as the Department of Justice is concerned, we were looking forward to the opportunity to give our depositions in this matter. And I might remind you.

00:47:49

That all of.

00:47:50

Us in the Department of Justice, who had any knowledge whatsoever of this case, have already subscribed and sworn to affidavit.

00:47:59

Subject to the penalties of perjury, those affidavits in each instance deny responsibility for being the source of a leak. Mr. Lyden.

00:48:10

Listed for the drawn out the anguish of a drawn out proceeding aren't you not? Are you not subject to the charge of permissiveness yourself? A little bit here, I mean, wouldn't he in another day have called you permissive and perhaps even a permissive judge? God knows. And secondly?

00:48:28

When you boil it all down, doesn't this amount have you not rendered a political bargain here rather than a criminal bargain? He has been allowed to go off without penalty, except that.

00:48:39

He gave up the office that apparently the White House always wanted him to give up the the last several months. Anyhow, it in in the end, is it not a political judgment rather than a prosecutorial judgment?

00:48:53

I think each individual.

00:48:55

Will have to make up his or her own mind about the.

00:48:59

The justice of this result.

00:49:03

I believe, as I have said, that it is just fair.

00:49:08

And honorable.

00:49:10

I have insisted and have done my best with my colleagues to assure that all the facts upon which the result was reached are publicly accessible as to the charge of permissiveness. All I can say, Chris, is that.

00:49:29

Insofar as any prosecuting role I've ever had that this would be the first time anybody has suggested that.

00:49:37

As to the political aspects of it, of course, in the in the fundamental sense of the word political. Of course it's political.

00:49:45

The.

00:49:48

We are dealing here with with issues involving the government of the United States of America. We are dealing with a situation involving a man next in line of succession who was next in line of succession to the Presidency itself.

00:50:07

While the Middle Eastern crisis had no direct bearing on the outcome, it certainly is a situation illustrative of the kind of problem that that had to be faced in, considering whether the national interest would be served if an indictment.

00:50:26

Were returned, and if the president, the vice president, as was his full.

00:50:31

Right.

00:50:32

Had insisted upon a trial either in the Congress, if the Congress had chosen to act.

00:50:38

Or.

00:50:39

By a jury of his peers.

00:50:45

There was some talk before you mentioned that the first round of negotiations failed in September. There's been discussion that conceivably it was listed the inconceivably the vice president did not want to serve any time in jail and that way you're longing that you would like us at all.

00:51:01

So what happened to to stop the first round?

00:51:05

I don't think it would be serving a useful purpose to go into this, the.

00:51:08

The the process of negotiation, of course, in a matter of this kind, is one in which, in which there were.

00:51:18

Strong interests represented by each side and the the result is one that I think represents.

00:51:31

A fair balance between those interests. Did you inform the President of the details of the investigation as contained in your 40 page statement early on in August or early in September? In other words, when he said that that nothing that the Vice president did had any relation to his?

00:51:52

Office of vice president. He was in fact, charged with committing the felony while he was in office. I wondering when the President knew about this and what he based that statement on.

00:52:04

President has never had more than a very summary.

00:52:10

Description of the kinds of evidence developed by the government's investigation he.

00:52:20

Felt that it was not appropriate for him to be informed of the details of the case.

00:52:27

He did have a broad description.

00:52:32

Essentially, in the same terms in which I presented an outline of the case to the Vice President himself on the same day.

00:52:39

Later in the afternoon, after I had seen the president.

00:52:45

The.

00:52:47

Fact that the investigation has touched on.

00:52:52

Actions of the vice president in his capacity as such does not constitute a charge. There has been no charge against the Vice president except the charge embodied in the information to which he pleaded no law yesterday we have summarized.

00:53:13

As accurately and fairly as we can, the substance of the government's evidence in order that.

00:53:23

The American.

00:53:24

People would would have this.

00:53:27

Before them.

00:53:29

But we.

00:53:31

Do not assert that this summary of the evidence is a.

00:53:39

Is an indictment. It is designed, as I've said, for purposes of disclosure.

00:53:48

And with the recognition that were this information not set forth, the consequence inevitably would have been that there would have been a persisting effort.

00:54:02

To dig it out, the process would have dragged on.

00:54:06

And the result would have been.

00:54:09

And open all.

00:54:10

Sir.

00:54:11

On the body politic, this gentleman right here.

00:54:16

Mr. Attorney General, based on your experience in the Agnew case and knowing that a presidential candidate cannot know everything about the man that chose his running mate, do you have any recommendations or any strengthening of the screening process, say for your party?

00:54:31

1976 from the choice of his vice presidential candidate.

00:54:36

It's very, I think, a very important point. It's one to which I've given some thought, but not enough to have any clear recommendation beyond the obvious point that there clearly ought to be some mechanism that enables the man chosen as his party's.

00:54:55

Standard bearer to get a more complete picture of the prior history of a proposed running mate. Mr. Cohen.

00:55:06

I have a question for Mr. Bell. One question.

00:55:10

Mr. Bell, the summary is not precise. On one point, how much money Mr. Riggi supposedly took? What does the Justice Department claim was the total amount of graft Agnew took in this kickback scheme.

00:55:23

I think the attorney general has already answered that question substantially when he indicated that the Internal Revenue Service.

00:55:30

Investigation in this case was not complete as of yesterday, and that it's is impossible for that reason to accurately answer in terms of dollars and cents, the amounts of monies which may have been involved, incidentally, I think.

00:55:48

It's important to to recognize from our standpoint the tremendously effective work that was done by the Internal Revenue Service and by the specifically the intelligence division of the Internal Revenue Service, which was the investigative arm of the United States Attorney's Office and the Department of Justice.

00:56:09

Throughout this entire matter.

00:56:12

Mr. Bell bell.

00:56:15

Thank you, Mr. Stewart, gentlemen.

00:56:20

Thank you very much.

00:56:22

Thank you.

00:56:26

That was Attorney General Elliot Richardson, speaking with newsmen for the better part of an hour today at the Justice Department. Among other things, Mr. Richardson said today that in effect, the punishment meted out to the vice president is fair just and honourable punishment enough. Any more punishment, he said, would be more than I could recommend or wish.

00:56:46

Although he indicated that there was some disagreement on that subject among the prosecutors in Baltimore.

00:56:53

He singled out for praise Henry Peterson, the assistant attorney general who was singled out for so much criticism by the vice president.

00:57:00

Richardson spoke of Peterson's distinguished service not just in this case, but over several years. He said the president was kept fully informed of the Agnew investigation and fully approved each major step that the president set no particular restrictions or guidelines that he was confident the President had had no reason to know.

00:57:20

About any possible misconduct by Mr. Agnew prior to being informed by Agnew and the Justice Department.

00:57:28

He said today the Justice Department did not initiate the plea bargaining in the case, that that was first brought up by Fred Bazart, who was a White House counsel. He said there were no efforts by the White House to quash the investigation. He said the vice president could still be called as a witness.

00:57:43

In other trials.

00:57:44

Richardson said he hopes the nation will feel.

00:57:47

Confidence in the process of criminal.

00:57:49

Justice, although he said he's aware some people may feel Agnew got off too lightly in this case.

00:57:56

US Attorney Bell indicated there may be more indictments that the grand jury investigation will continue. Richardson says there was no campaign of leaks on the part of the Justice Department. He flatly contradicted the vice president's charges on those in that case. And he said he personally would not consider accepting the vice presidential nomination as Agnew's successor.

00:58:17

He said that would be inappropriate in his role as government accuser. This is Mary Sarah from CBS News in Washington.

00:58:25

This has been a CBS News Special report.

00:58:29

This is CBS.